

2004 Election: Future of the Two Party System

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AUGUST 27, 2004 | The panel discussed the U.S. political system, its historical development, its current state, and its future.

Mr. Raskin gave a historical overview of the development of political parties and their platforms during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He noted that platforms have often not been followed and many times contain internal contradiction. He discussed the Democratic and Republican parties' platforms during the current election, and noted that in spite of many complaints that the two parties are too similar, there are significant differences in their platforms.

Ms. Anderson spoke about some of the similarities between the 2004 platforms, particularly in respect to certain rhetorical devices and their lack of satisfactory attention to issues facing the poorest Americans.

Professor Levine spoke about the long-term prospects of the current party-system. He questioned, "Whether the Republican Party will survive until 2008?" He talked about the parties' mutual dependence, and he noted that the "party of the lesser evil requires the specter of a greater evil still." He argued that this dependence is more acute for the Democrats. He asserted that since 1980, longstanding political coalitions have shifted and that the political "conversation" has changed as well.

The panelists responded to audience questions.

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next the future of the two-party system a panel of political scholars talks at the Institute of policy studies this is about an hour hello and welcome to defining the issues a biweekly series sponsored by the institute for policy studies i'm sarah anderson of the institute for policy studies and we are the nation's oldest multi-issue progressive think tank and today we're going to be talking about the Republican National Convention as delegates are arriving in New York City there has already been a lot of press coverage of this event but I'd have to say I think most of it has focused on the not so substantive issues one story we've been following closely here at IPS is the Battle of the grass you might know that this has to do with our allies United for peace and justice and their struggle for many months to try to get a permit for an anti-war demonstration in New York City's Central Park unfortunately local officials there have decided it's more important to protect the grass than it is to protect freedom of speech there's also been a lot of coverage of the security fortress that's being erected in New York City to protect the delegates and then of course there's been the coverage of the dizzying array of celebrities that are converging in New York City to show their support for the Grand Old Party and you can imagine why it's a little hard to focus on the serious political matters when the likes of Wayne Newton or bo Derek might pop up at any minute today though seriously at IPS we're going to focus on the serious stuff the serious political substantive issues and we're going to go beyond the glitz and the glamour the security hysteria to do this we're going to look at what the Republican Party really stands for or at least what they say they stand for in their official platform we're going to look at

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platform we're going to look at comparing contrasting the Republican platform with a Democratic one this is a follow up to discussion we had earlier on the Democratic party platform and we'll also then look at this two-party system that we are living under is it really working for the American people is this the best democracy that we can have and where is it going joining us today are two of the country's most astute political scholars here is Andy Levine a professor of the University of Wisconsin and also an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland he is the author of American ideology engaging political philosophy Hobbes to Rawls as well as rethinking liberal equality we're also joined by my colleague Marcus Raskin he co-founded this organization the institute for policy studies in 1963 after a stint with the Kennedy administration more recently he's the author of liberalism the genius of American ideals and here at IPS he also directs the past for the 21st century project which is producing a multi-volume work trying to learn the lessons from the past century I also want to welcome our listeners on pacifica radio as well as our viewers on c-span I'm going to start out with a few questions from our grass you can because I think given his experience with the Kennedy administration and also as a very close observer of presidencies over the years he can help us understand what is a political platform what is the importance of it is there any importance to it is this something that is really a blueprint for political parties that they actually follow in in detail or is it something that these delegates in New York and at previous conventions just toss in the garbage can as they're on their way out of the Convention and no one ever pays any attention to it so mark if you can help us understand really the significance of these platforms well thank you of fourth a

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platforms well thank you of fourth a place to begin believe it or not as in 1840 with Martin Van Buren which apparently is the first party platform and it ran a thousand words and it was committed to several positions one position was that the federal government should be weak second that you had to watch out for a national bank and be against it because the people who would end up running the country would be the rich and you always had to guard against them the third position was that states rights which meant that you should that abolitionists who were then on the move could be controlled locally by each of the states that is by the southern states especially so that was the position they came from also it was one of the first of party conventions of a more major party more major party and it reflected Van Buren's view that you had to rationalize the party system which until that I was a very which was a ragged system before them in fact in the Federalist Papers that the notion wasn't that one of the great dangers was factions and Madison made that argument about factions and and on the other hand what you had to do was balance off the factions and so this came to be rationalized that in the context of political parties but that it is to pursue that from what happened is that parties then began looking for some coherence to their point of view which is very very hard to find because it was still comprised of various factions

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still comprised of various factions themselves so that the usually it's been the case that party platforms are compromises the ones that usually are not compromises our small parties that is parties that our breakaway parties from the two major parties or those who have a much stronger ideological cast that isn't to say that the two major parties don't and as will come to develop the argument we'll see how indeed they have a very very strong ideological cast and I'm sure Andy will speak to that as well can you think of examples though where information in the platform was not followed well I can think of one case there are many cases of course but one case which is especially interesting to this generation and to the Vietnam generation as you read the 1964 platform when Lyndon Johnson rule he was a very very strong candidate he later got sixty-two percent of the vote against against Barry Goldwater the first several pages of that platform are given over to peace and how them the most important thing that any nation and any national government can do is to assure the piece is to develop those programs that are sure peace and one example that he gave for that purpose was the signing of the nuclear test ban arrangement which was done under President Kennedy to show that this was a party of peas well within three years the fact was that 1967 came along and he lost he didn't lose the the nomination there but in New Hampshire but he lost who he lost

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in New Hampshire but he lost who he lost enough votes in against McCarthy there to drop out of the race and part of the reason in my view that he dropped out of the race was a substantial number of the people in the Democratic Party were anti-war and had remembered the realities of that particular party platform now you of course have other cases where just to clarify so they declared they were absolutely committed to peace and then shortly before getting into the PNL more exactly they with that was their purpose they were committed to peace now there were contradictions in that platform and indeed you still see that in the Democratic platform we're number one we're going to stay number one nobody's going to push us around we've increased our armaments and so forth and so on so that you have both things going on at the same time but the extraordinary thing is the language of that platform which in effect made the point in order to rebuild or have a Great Society you had to have peace that was the underlying context so they were saber rattling at the same time that they were talking peace well what else can have you learned you think looking at platforms over time about history can you see a consistency about history and in looking at political platforms well I think you can see a consistency of the problems that we face one problem always which is present in one form or another and is war and preparation for war and expansion that's really been there since the beginning of the United States whether it was against the Indians whether it was the Civil War whether it was post 1898 and the spanish-american war and so forth there's always an addressing to the question of war because we are either in war or preparing for war a second thing

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war or preparing for war a second thing which is always there in different forms is the question of race first is the question of slavery than its question of race neyo slavery it then also begins to be transformed into the issue of poor vs rich which we can talk about that's always present so the class then is part of that class issues are also always there in one form or another for example in nineteen thirty in the 1930s that was a fundamental issue for the New Deal even a Russian say even in the 1948 platform of Truman this was a very important issue against Wall Street and so forth which was picked up in order to co-opt the position taken by the Henry Wallace progressives so that's always been there as well as part of it there's a fourth piece this which is national triumphalism we are the greatest nation in the world we are there's nobody like us we are the mansion on the hill and so forth and so on and so there's always a form of patriotism in some cases it ends up into nationalist patriotism almost a fascist type of thing but mostly it's just patriotism and pride in the United States that pride also comes from another thing it comes from the swearing of allegiance to the United States because you will recall that with the Civil War it wasn't the case that at first nine and thirteen states were were swearing allegiance to the United States so patriotism then became defined in terms of that form of swearing allegiance it's not enough to just say you're the best party or you have the best candidate but we have to be the

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best candidate but we have to be the best country in the world well thanks for those historical insights let's turn now to the political platforms of this election year here in 2004 a lot of people on the political left complain a lot that the two parties the two dominant parties are identical that there really aren't significant differences there and you know looking at the platform so I have to say a number of distinctions did jump out at me and so I'd like to just us identify a number of them one is abortion rights the Republicans say they want a constitutional ban on abortion the Democrats say they proudly stand by a woman's right to choose there's the gay rights issue Republicans again won a constitutional ban on legal unions for same-sex couples in the platform they go even further to say they don't want gay partners to share in employee benefits the Democrats on the other hand say they want full inclusion and benefits for gay and lesbian families on trade policy which is something that I work on a lot i have to say i am actually kind of surprised to see that the democrats did a pretty decent job of reflecting the concerns of labor unions environmentalists other groups that have very strongly opposed our current trade policies the Republicans on the other hand are rah rah for the status quo I'd say on environment the Democrats really come out as being much more advanced in their

positions and supporting renewable energy and so forth and just one other point on Social Security the Republicans have said that they are in favor of at least partially privatizing Social Security and the Democrats have said they are against that and so just these are a few examples of where I see strong distinctions in the platforms is that enough for people to feel that American voters do have a choice in this election well again I think question is the

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well again I think question is the hierarchy of interest of a particular voter in other words if you are gay and you're for gay union gay marriage you're definitely going to go to the Democrats the position taken by the Republicans when they ask for constitutional amendments know very well that those I would guess cannot become constitutional amendments because they have to go through the states they have to go through Congress and there would be just too much grading so in a sense this is i watch as far as I'm concerned now with regard to the environment i think you're right i think there is a profound difference i would say that the purpose of the democrats will be to undo some of the things that have been done over the course of the last few years that i think is fairly clear in terms of who it is that they'll bring in to those particular jobs so i would say that that where you're describing there is a very big difference there's a very big difference with regard to social security where the interest is of and it's been a long term one of the Republican Party really not to have a social security system on the grounds that somehow Social Security system would bow both protect people who probably shouldn't be protective that is the poor and the not so poor and furthermore that it is an invasion into the rights of the individual to invest his or her own money the theory there being again that one generation should not take care of another generation but it also misunderstands the way the Social Security system operates well speaking of the poor I need to point out one similarity I noticed in both of the platforms which is that I think they

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platforms which is that I think they both pretty much ignore the poor the Democratic platform has a big section on the great American middle class and that is really their focus with maybe a few exceptions and the focus of the Republicans as well is on the middle class and not the poor and I guess we can all be safe and assuming that a big part of the explanation for that is because the poor votes in you know less percentage numbers than people in other income groups and so they feel like they do not need to take that part of our population as seriously and I'm wondering from your perspective if you think hasn't always been that way how the dominant parties always pretty much ignored the interests of the poor the answer I think is no there always has been at least in the 20th century interest in individual striving so for example would will Woodrow Wilson talks about the striving the individual to become part of the middle class to the big phrase of course has always been to be self-made so that's been part of the lore of the the American society that were self-made individuals are self-made they don't have any help from anybody and so forth and so on of the change however big time comes again in the New Deal and hear the argument is you can't have nation which is one-third ill house they'll close poor etc and then by 1945 at the end of the Second World War you have certain very interesting and important things happening you have well over 16 million people than in the Armed Forces they come back into the into American society and the fear is they're going to come back the fear of government is they will

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back the fear of government is they will come back into a society where there were twenty percent unemployed and you can imagine having the return of so many millions of men and william women who were faced unemployment it would be a situation very similar to what happened in Germany after the First World War so the position that was taken by a president roosevelt in his last address to his last economic report to congress was a bill of rights for everybody in that bill of rights started not from the position of the bill of rights for the middle class the Bill of economic rights for the middle class but a billet economic rights for everybody in that context being the right to housing the right to a job the right to education etc notice always these are

rights they're not necessarily something that you have in terms of entitlement charity not charity so just to finish the point in terms of Clinton Clinton came forward said Bill of economic rights for the middle class and again this pushed down the concern of the poor and the lower middle class in ways that they're hidden well thank you very much Marcus rasca and I have more questions for you but I'll hold them to later and move now to Andy Levine again Andy is a professor at the University of Wisconsin as well as an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland and he's going to share his thoughts on the history and future of the Republican Party and the two-party system and where we're headed well I want to ask a question that might seem rather odd i want to ask whether the GOP will survive until two thousand and I think it's a fair question to ask what is sure is that a struggle is under way in which the party itself is at stake and that in that context the Republican

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and that in that context the Republican old guard the prosperous and upper-middle classes are losing ground it's precisely that old guard along with so-called moderates who think as they do that the Democrats want to win over indeed for many in the Democratic Party is evidenced in their platform and in their electoral politics since their convention it seems that their allegiance is even more desired and victory itself Republicans and Democrats need one another for the Democrats the need is so acute that if the Republican Party did not exist it would be necessary for them to invent it the party of the lesser evil requires the specter of a greater evil still in our electoral duopoly only Republicans can play that role for Democrats indeed if there is any other reason to be for the Democrats in 2004 it is subtle or well hidden this is why John Kerry is the perfect standard bearer for the Democrats for the Democratic Party today his selection was warranted by one thing only that among the relevant alternatives he seemed to the majority of Democratic voters the most likely to keep Bush at bay the Democratic Party has always drawn votes from an improbable mix of constituencies even before Bill Clinton moved the party several orders of magnitude to the right it was lesser evil ISM that held it together leading genuine liberals and trade unionists to find common ground with segregationists and social conservatives back then when there really was a Democratic wing of the Democratic Party that wasn't thoroughly marginalized the Republicans presented a more coherent picture theirs was the party of big business but it was also the party of mainstream Protestant America the robber barons and the farmers of the Midwest had at least that much in common shared material interests were scanned but cultural affinities joined Republican voters together that world is gone and its absence is registered in our political

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registered in our political I for at least the past quarter-century the so-called Reagan Revolution marked its consummation it was in that period that the Grand Old Party came to rely for votes on radical evangelicals hyper Zionists socially conservative Catholics libertarians and like-minded proponents of voodoo economics fiscal conservatives Neo isolationists and Teddy Roosevelt style imperialists in comparison the Democrats seem almost homogeneous elements of the Republican old guard may be drawn to voodoo economics and at the extremes libertarianism and there are certainly fiscal conservatives neo isolationists and imperialists among them but however useful they may be they have little in common with impoverished Protestant fundamentalists conservative working-class Catholics and uppity right-wing Jews they have been extraordinarily adept however at manipulating the convictions of these constituencies and using them for their own benefit a phenomenon brilliantly documented in Thomas Frank's new book what's the matter with Kansas with the survival media in hand they have proven right the dictum of the greatest Republican of all that you can fool some of the people all of the time however as Lincoln also observed there are limits to how much the people can be fooled because reality always intrudes so far though reality has been kept at bay how is that possible the short answer is that the GOP stumbled upon the method the Democrats pioneered they found a greater evil but for Republicans to make lesser evil ISM work for them they had first to set American politics on a new course they had to change the conversation the Democrats were more than willing to oblige in an electoral duopoly there can only be two lesser evil parties if there's some dimension along which parties cluster in a polarized way this would be the case whenever parties can be arrayed along the left-right spectrum then those on the Left would see the rightmost alternative is the greatest evil and vice versa until quite recently such a

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vice versa until quite recently such a spectrum that exists more or less within our two parties as much as between them in brief the left was egalitarian the right was not since those who stand to gain from egalitarian redistribution outnumber those who stand to lose and since our two parties actively conspired to marginalize independent and third-party candidacies and since the Republican Party no longer has a liberal wing just an increasingly anxious old guard and some fellow travelling moderates there is no way for it to induce the majority or even a plurality of voters to vote for it on the basis of material interests there for so long as distribution is the issue the Democratic Party can play the role of greater evil only for a small minority of very well-off voters fortunately for the Republicans though some influential Democrats got it into their heads around the time that Reagan and Bush assumed office that the way forward for them was to abandon or rather to marginalize the party's Democratic wing in an effort to win over moderates and old guard Republicans this was not completely unreasonable where else could traditional democratic constituencies go moreover the way to implement this strategy was easy and obvious all the Democrats had to do was remain liberal on the so-called wedge issues the ones the Republicans were already using to entice legions of have-nots into voting against their own interests thus a new left right spectrum came into being based more on what pundits call values than interests this has become the terrain on which our elections today are fought it goes without saying that this change of focus works to the advantage of the beneficiaries of the system in place because it takes redistribution off the table the problem that the fortunate few now face is to secure what they have achieved by keeping the conversation stalled where it is in this endeavor the Democrats are on board Shen

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endeavor the Democrats are on board Shen Eddie should anyone from that parties now in significant Democratic wings suggest otherwise John Kerry recently took pains to remind the voting like that he emphatically he is not a redistributionist in deciding to become the party of well-off voters who cannot stomach fundamentalists the Democrats are rather the New Democrats as they started calling themselves in the 1980s didn't just help Republicans change the conversation they handed them a foil for every reactionary sentiment that had accumulated since the New Deal the old Democratic coalition minus the solid South but with a bit of already disaffected moderate support in recompense was still sufficiently robust to elect bill clinton president twice in the 1990s but for a variety of reasons not least is manifest in authenticity and opportunism clinton was a leader who was easy to despise it required no vast right-wing conspiracy to turn him into a target of cultural resentment though it didn't hurt that there was a well-funded when operating in the wings Fanning the flames thus there came to be if not exactly a greater evil than its functional equivalent hatred of the Clintons and of what they came to represent to boaters alienated by changes in 20th century mores sufficed to cement the Republicans new unholy alliance nowadays of course Clinton is history in 2000 al gore was still tarnished by the association much as he tried not to be but John Kerry is no Bill Clinton to turn him into a target of resentment the vast right-wing conspiracy will have to work overtime it seems it has already begun still one can only wonder how defenders of george w bush and the chickenhawks his selection empowered can accuse anyone much less kerry of fabricating credentials for being a war president is that much what's possible evidently so at least for now but mass delusions correct themselves eventually the Republican

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themselves eventually the Republican Party is just fractious enough that maybe this time the correction will come before it is too late for one thing win or lose in November conjuncture all factors weigh heavily against the Republican Party no one ever expected much from george w bush but his father's quote cronies and protégées were a different or a different matter however once in power to everyone's amazement they have governed with unsurpassed ineptitude despite the taint of the legitimacy that afflicted the bush administration in his first happier it was after all installed by Bush family cronies they pushed forward with their own reedus redistributionist agenda redistributing from the poor to the rich then shamelessly exploiting the opportunities

handed them by 911 they plunged recklessly ahead targeting not just the vestiges of the new deal but Progressive Era reforms to buy almost any measure in almost every way they have proven themselves utterly incapable they've wreaked havoc on our economy despite an upturn in the business cycle they've involved the country in two disastrous never-ending Wars they've struck profound if not fatal blows at alliances that had endured for generations they've undermined civil liberties they put the country at risk of terrorist attacks now and in the future to a degree that was unthinkable before and although the Democrats are too cowardly to make an issue of it they've committed the highest of crimes and misdemeanors they lied the country into war it's hard to imagine how any self-interested member of our economic elite could keep faith with these bunglers especially when there is at hand a competent rival either to step in and do them service many of them are no doubt lured by greed they know from experience that there is almost nothing the bush administration won't do for them but how can they be so myopic can't they see that they really do need a state that functions as their Executive Committee that forces them to forbear from seeking immediate advantages in order to keep the system afloat some do this is why many among them are

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this is why many among them are defecting one can only feel embarrassed for the rest the Democrats are plainly counting on the enlightened self-interest at the very very rich to overcome that congenital loyalty to the Republican Party that keeps them in the bush camp it could happen despite its best efforts to the contrary the Bush administration is pushing them away there's a psychological dimension to in the New Democrat strategy some malefactors of great wealth like Bush himself are smugly and different to what anyone a narrow circle of like-minded people think but the vast majority of moderate voters are of a different cast of mind the kerry campaign knows this it was a theme of their Boston Convention they know that minus a few arrogant fools our elites and those who think like them are as insecure culturally as we're their counterparts in the Gilded Age and therefore that there are many among them who in their hearts are uncomfortable with the commander in chief whom the whole world knows to be a laughingstock this sensibility could become a factor with which to reckon beneficiaries of Republican policies have deeper structural reasons to be anxious about the course their party is taking even if cultural resentments too old today's Republican voting bloc together the Republican electorate has as much reason to resent other Republican voters as anyone else can support for the Israeli right keep Christian Zionists who seek to hasten the conversion of the Jews and Armageddon in the same camp as neocon the code Knicks who can barely conceal their contempt well opposition to abortion and open homosexuality keep Protestant evangelicals forever aligned with Catholic social conservatives followers of the Antichrist and what of the poor libertarians in this age of Ashcroft and with social conservatism riding high they become as marginalized within the Republican Party as progressives are in the party of the lesser evil it's no surprise therefore that the Libertarian Party is poised in 2004 to draw more than a few votes away from george w bush to be sure the libertarians agree with

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to be sure the libertarians agree with other constituencies in the Republican electorate the taxes should be cut and Social Services restricted for them unlike the others this is even a principled conviction but since it is only the well-to-do who stand to benefit from such policies one can only wonder how long unity can endure on this basis inveterate snobbishness matters too it is why I and evidently also the kerry campaign think the affections are more likely at the top at least in the short run that at the bottom the class composition of the republican electorate is shifting it may already have tipped to the point that the lower orders now run the show if kerry is the emblematic democrat george w bush epitomizes this additional state of affairs descended on both sides from families that insinuated themselves into the highest reaches of the Eastern aristocracy a graduate of Andover and Yale he sounds acts and things like a new bow like a nouveau riche Texas oilman caricaturing with every gesture and remarked the mores of the good people his family and their ilk have bled dry for generations he comes on as a good old boy but this is opposed it isn't easily reproducible in a politician playing it capable of playing a national role as but bushes by an accident of birth even brother Jeb doesn't quite cut it before long without a suitable figure whose personality somehow holds it all together the

Republicans will have to go one way or the other and the old guard and the moderates already know which way it will be the Republican Party today reflects and magnifies the polarization of America's class structure everywhere thanks largely to Republican policies and democratic acquiescence the very rich get richer at the expense of everyone else because they understand how their privileges are sustained the old guard and the so-called moderates are content for now with this arrangement but they can't like it much this is why it is likely that at some point maybe sooner than we think they'll have had enough if Bush doesn't embarrass them sufficiently to push them

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embarrass them sufficiently to push them into the welcoming Democratic fold his supporters will Bill Clinton the New Democrat felt the pain of those on whom he afflicted it but in the end he'd rather hang out with the rich and famous or failing that with ordinary people blessed by fortune so too would the rest of them why else would they assume the mantle of the Republican Party of yesteryear before their get their wet they get their way though they have a lot of electoral inertia to overcome but as the Bush administration wrecks everything it touches and as it encourages the rabble to take control the counter force may prove irresistible the present GOP leadership ones very much to resist this eventuality they're aware to that the old guard is not yet ready a southern segregationists were three decades ago to change party affiliations their intent on taking advantage this resistance to change ends a platform that taken at its word is in most respects no more reactionary and if anything a tad less pious than the Democrats unlike the Democratic platform which was controlled by the Kerry campaign and which therefore provides a good indication of what the Democrats in power will do the Republican platform provides hardly any indication at all the role of the platform instead is to remind the old guard that the party is not just for them it is also still of them thus the platform is prey to that is paraded out in the same spirit as our people of color at their conventions or moderates such as Giuliani McCain and Arnold Schwarzenegger the idea is to reassure the voters the Democrats those voters that the Democrats want to win over that the Republican Party still belongs to them and that it is still moderate at its core the problem of the GOP is that these PR gestures fly too much in the face of reality from a strictly electoral point of view it would make more sense for Democrats to go after the electorate that doesn't vote at all the half of the electorate

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vote at all the half of the electorate that doesn't vote at all and to try to win over prosperous but anxious Republicans and moderate independence and insofar as the Republican electorate is up for grabs it would make more sense to go after the part of it that embarrasses the old guard than to go after the old guard itself but the Democrats are loath to do anything of the sort because it would alienate their corporate paymasters so what one might ask if the idea is only to raise money to get elected but that isn't the only idea at least not for the Democrats there isn't enough percentage in it there are perks that go along with being a party of the privileged perks that go beyond the spoils of electoral office itself small wonder then the Democrats especially New Democrats look at the respectable remnant of the Republican Party increasingly alienated from its base and at the prosperous prosperous moderates who usually vote with them and ask why not us with the Republican Party embodying so many contradictions it is not an unreasonable question the demise of the Republican Party or if not a significant reconfiguration would be a mixed blessing but it does present an opportunity of a kind that has not existed for decades it is the conventional wisdom that the coming election will be close I confess I can't see how even the combined forces of James Baker Karl Rove and Osama bin Laden can save George Bush now but even if Kerry only wins by a hair the restoration of the lesser evil party will come as a relief for the world and for most Americans to it will delay and perhaps even a verte impending catastrophes brought on or accelerated by the shortsightedness and ineptitude of the current administration win or lose though the time is now to start to seize the opportunities that impending changes in party alignments will bring who knows but perhaps soon we will be able to move beyond lesser evil ism all together and beyond the institutional arrangements electoral and otherwise that make it our best hope perhaps we

[00:38:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-0KKdQARqc&t=2280s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-0KKdQARqc&t=2280s)

that make it our best hope perhaps we can build a party that is genuinely not just nominally Republican and Democratic a party of the vast disenfranchised majority thank you Andy Lavine for that very creative if not depressing description of our current political system one question I want to throw out to mark Raskin and he can maybe address this in his comments as well as to the audience's how do we move beyond lesser evil ISM you know can we hope that there will be real change in our political system here someone pointed out the other day or argued that really the only time in our history in this country we've had a third party rise to power was the Republican Party as a result of the ruptures during the Civil War and argued that it takes that level of social upheaval in this country for anything like that to ever happen so we can pretty much forget about it for the near future on the other hand you look at countries that have changed their political system I've read a little bit about you know New Zealand they switched from having a british-style election system to a proportional representation one it can be done in other countries is it possible here and and how could we do it mark Raskin would you like to respond first and then we'll take a few questions from the audience I think first of all obviously it's very hard secondly you do have to look for a systemic break in the organizing of a structure so that enough people leave that structures they were going to move in another way and if those people usually have to come from different classes together and that's kind of the history of what's what happened in Europe it's not necessarily the history of what happened in the United States in

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of what happened in the United States in the great agrarian period in the 20th century the systemic break came at the in my view Vietnam War period in which it was clear that we were engaged in a impossible war and it made no sense and a people understood that there was there were a lot of nuclear weapons around and they could all go off and somehow the system itself was not speaking to that question and that at that time you had what worked and he's talking about you had a democratic party which was made up of City bosses in the major cities southern racists intellectual and labor bosses and they could hardly hold and hold themselves together and labor during that period favored the war it had labored not favored the war that would have resulted in a very great change in American in American life indeed wherever was the case in the 20th century for the labor unions to in fact come forward and support a third party they didn't and the fact that they did not have that the parties did not have the small parties did not have the support of labor unions greatly narrowed the possibility for any change one of the things listening to Professor Levine's speak which is I think very important to remember and this is a mild tumor is that the parties themselves now are quite protium that is to say they can take whatever shape anybody wants them to take as a result of a communication system which keeps hammering a

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system which keeps hammering a propaganda system which keeps hammering at the most simple-minded ideas and slogans and people just keep at them an actor who who are part of this propaganda machine you saw this really in in the 1930s in Germany and in the late twenties where certain people understood that if you keep hammering at the same slogans and you make believe that somehow there are scapegoats or that there's a misunderstanding of who's really at fault and so forth but that then can enforce the the anger of people to move very far over to extremes but especially far over to the right that's what happened in Germany in this country the question of is tied to now is tied to the fact that we have a war system in a national security system that we don't seem to be able to get out of as you read the two party platforms each one attempts I'll do the other in terms of war making possibilities and continuing as a war continuing war as a basic way of life in America and also as a basic economic system for the country the defense system for the second is the fact that international capitalism has is is neither regulated by the national States by the United States force the American corporations or the United Nations and that there are movements now in the world of course that want to confront this but they're nowhere near as strong for that to occur so one major issue in American life for a political

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issue in American life for a political party the struggle can go on either outside the political party inside it in demonstrations in small groups is the need to address two fundamental ideas the international corporation and its that where it's going and the national security state there are other issues which can in fact be dealt with in the present system in my view one is a health system another as a protection of Social Security of third yard is providing a greater child care and so forth and so on but the basic issues the basic issues of this period are not being dealt with well we could open it up for questions from the audience if anyone would like to jump in right here can we bring the microphone oh go ahead please Oh does it make intellectual or any kind of sense to you as far as the way the reform party has moved in the last decade from ross perot to jesse ventura to pep Buchanan to Ralph Nader if you're talking about the trouble with the Democrats and Republicans doesn't there seem to even be more problem with a reformed party I'm curious if in particularly now since Ralph Nader did get that reform nomination he didn't choose to seek the Green Party nomination was that a mistake would either of you have advice for him and I wonder do you think he may be too egotistical to lead a party you've hit on a pretty sensitive issue around here at this for Policy Studies Andy would you like to well I I don't want to give the impression that I was advocating a third-party ism at this stage although I

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third-party ism at this stage although I suppose I do I mean I think that the problem the main thing for us now I think that the situation now anda speaks to what Mark was saying before is that opportunities are presenting themselves not because of any fundamental changes in our society but because the Republican Party under George Bush has created so much havoc that the that the Republican Party which has been the main vehicle for securing the national security state and for enhancing the emitter a shin of the poor and the rest started with Democratic acquiescence but it has been the main vehicle that that could very well go or at least be so severely challenged that that things are going to change our the Democrats poised to take advantage of it hardly certainly not they certainly don't seem to be with their obsession with capturing the moderate voters in swing states is there a chance of reforming the Democratic Party from within which was basically what Dennis Kucinich and how Sharpton and maybe Carol Moseley Braun we try it was trying to do again i think that the prospects for that are bleak as the situation there showed can it be changed from outside by someone like ralph nader well Nader at least does in a way I think he's wrong about this in this electoral cycle but at least in a way by not pursuing a safe state strategy he is and if there is a fear in on carries part as the election draws closer that they could lose some states to the nadir vote he is providing some kind of impetus for moving carry just a little bit more to the left than he would otherwise be you know but that's but but it's we're not the problem is that we're just not that strong yet and I think that what we need to do is to work out how to become stronger in the new period which is presenting itself and which in which in a way our greatest ally is

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which in a way our greatest ally is george w bush win or lose he's that's that's what's that's what's made openings possible well i think your question is a very important one first of all what is interesting now is a good number of the generals have turned against porsche and that's a fascinating change in American politics where they're prepared to speak out in a very direct way against what Bush is done part of it is because I think he's seen as an imprudent imperialist and on the other side of the coin I think they see a Kerry as a prudent man a prudent imperialist and they would see him as much more competent rational and so forth they also feel strongly that is the generals that they're being undercut by very stupid leadership in say arrogant leadership inside the department of defense when it comes to the point that you're making there's a rule in American politics which I suspect may apply at this stage but doesn't usually apply which is that a people running for office invariably end up on opposite sides of the fence of each other and as the campaign goes on both end up sounding exactly alike and both seem to be exactly in the center in each

taking from the other what they're thinking about that allowed for for example nadir who I hold in the highest regard to see to see platforms and political parties merely as tools or weigh stations and no more nor less I view that as a mistake I see that again

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view that as a mistake I see that again as a mistake that goes to the heart of how you can present a principled position beyond yourself which is of also manifested through a political party the difficulty I think with Nader's position is that he is assuming that what he can do is catalyzed a kind of change in the system as an individual that he was able to do with regard to confrontation with General Motors but that's not happening I was just hoping that you could come in a little bit about the history of protest at the conventions as we've seen large amounts of folks demonstrating both up in Boston and in New York well there are different levels of protests that have occurred in the in the 1930s there were huge protests related to unemployment there was something called the unemployment consoles and there are some million people who were part of the unemployment consoles and they did a very great deal of protesting both elections and on the streets and so forth the fact was that during that period protests and in American history generally but during that period especially they were quite violent in other words in some cases they would take over state capitals and they would sit there this had occurred in Minnesota for example in North Dakota in terms of the demonstrations in recent years the the demonstration of course that the Democratic Party convention was turned out to be quite brutal I know something about it because I attempted to start a party then kawaii are you referring to 1968 called the new

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are you referring to 1968 called the new party but the people on the streets at that point really would have none of that and they were interested in getting arrested confronting the Democratic Party on the other side of the coin Mayor Daley was very much into getting even with the people who were demonstrating and he was trying to prove that indeed he could control that city and he was less interested in what would happen to the Democratic Party and to Hubert Humphrey than he was to make clear that he could patrol the city why don't we take one more question hi thank you I was wondering I guess I might be able to guess Andy's answer from what he was talking about earlier but do you see a change in the two-party system in the United States and if so would that happen suddenly with the demise of one of the major parties or would have happened slowly with implementations of policies like Instant Runoff voting and other policies that allow third parties to compete on a national level well that's a question that should be addressed to a younger person not to me in other words I look back and look at the present i can only speculate and hope about you know what should happen obviously some things come as I've suggested from major events for example if it's the case the nuclear weapon goes off someplace in the world or the United States begins using nuclear weapons that will cause a major shift inside American life if it's the case that crisis occurs in the economic system that that both simultaneously goes to inflation and depression that causes a profound institutional decomposition if you are asking me the question can things move slowly that way I'm not so sure because I am struck by the fact that the situation in this country is is open to mass manipulation indeed

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mass manipulation indeed we've learned over the last few years that a lot of a lot of votes don't get counted and the reality of the matter is that unless there's constitutional change the electoral college makes clear that this is not a democracy this is at best a republic so there has to be major shifts in my view in the structure itself beyond the parties Thank You Marcus Raskin and thank you also andy levine for being our guest today I also want to thank people who have tuned into this program and for those of you who don't know very much about the institute for policy studies I want to share that we are an organization that for over 40 years has been linking scholarship with activism we do research we do education that's linked to social movements starting with the civil rights movement in the 60s the women's movement and these days with the peace and global justice movements I want to highlight just in one second part of our work that we're very proud of and

that is that for nearly 30 years we have been struggling to bring justice for the victims of jagan dictator augusto pinochet it's been a long struggle we got involved because two of our colleagues were assassinated by agents of Pinochet right here in Washington DC in 1976 by a car bomb we've been working with people around the world to hold Pinochet accountable for these crimes and we are celebrating today because the Chilean Supreme Court has stripped Pinochet of his immunity from prosecution and he now appears to be headed to trial and I want to congratulate my colleague Marcus Raskin who has been central to this struggle for so many years i also want to and I sincerely mean that he has been on the front lines of those battles if people want more information about the institute for policy studies you can go to our website let me give out the web address it's w wips hyphen dcor gee

[00:56:04 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-0KKdQARqc&t=3364s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-0KKdQARqc&t=3364s)

address it's w wips hyphen dcor gee that's IPS hyphen dcor g we have a great study on that website about the cost of war we've documented the cost for Americans Iraqis and people around the world next year next week we'll have a great new study out about CEO pay at companies that are leading the trend of outsourcing service jobs to low-wage countries and there's lots of other great information on there I'll get the website one more time it's IPS hyphen dcor G and thank you once again our panelists Marcus Raskin and Andy Levine as well as our audience here in Washington our listeners on Pacifica Radio and our viewers on c-span thanks again i'm sarah anderson what you're saying about the Republicans is making sense quiet but sure staying over at one

END